

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION OF LAND
AT STEYNING MUSEUM, CHURCH STREET,
STEYNING, WEST SUSSEX.**

NGR TQ 17825 11315

Project Number 04 / 05

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CONTENTS.

List of illustrations.

Abstract.

1.0. INTRODUCTION.

2.0. GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND.

3.0. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

4.0. PROJECT OBJECTIVES.

5.0. INVESTIGATIVE METHODOLOGY.

6.0. FIELDWORK RESULTS.

7.0. POTTERY REPORT.

8.0. CONCLUSIONS.

9.0. ARCHIVE.

10.0. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

11.0. REFERENCES.

S.M.R. Summary Sheet.

Illustrations.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

- Figure 1.** Site location plan.
- Figure 2.** Trench location plan.
- Figure 3.** Trench plan.
- Figure 4.** Trench sections.
- Figure 5.** Photographs of possible posthole 3 and linear ditch 5.

ABSTRACT.

An archaeological field evaluation of land proposed for development at Steyning Museum, Church Street, Steyning, West Sussex was undertaken by C. G. Archaeology.

The excavation of a 9m. – long and 2m. – wide trench across the Area of Interest revealed a single possible posthole of certain Saxo-Norman origin and one later Saxon or Saxo-Norman ditch / gulley. An apparent stone – lined pit of uncertain date was also recorded.

This project has thus confirmed that the intended construction site encompasses a low density spread of archaeological features, of some importance to our detailed understanding of Steyning's later Saxon - Saxo-Norman genesis and development.

1.0. INTRODUCTION.

- 1.1. This document presents the results of an archaeological field evaluation conducted across land adjacent Steyning Museum, Church Street, Steyning, West Sussex (N.G.R. TQ 17825 11315) (Figure 1).
- 1.2. Steyning Museum Trust has received planning approval for the construction of a 9m. – long and 7m. – wide extension to the south of the existing museum (Area of Interest hachured on Figure 2). However, as the proposed development lies within the medieval core of historic Steyning (see Section 3.0.) it was judged that groundworks associated with the scheme could impact upon archaeologically significant features and deposits. John Mills, the West Sussex County Council Archaeologist, therefore recommended that the site should be the subject of an archaeological trial – excavation prior to the onset of building work.
- 1.3. It should be noted that no fresh examination of available cartographic and documentary sources or the West Sussex County Sites and Monuments Record (S.M.R.) was undertaken as part of the current project. Consequently, the primary aim of this report is to simply document and discuss the fieldwork results.
- 1.4. The investigative methodology employed during the evaluation was based upon a targeted Method Statement prepared by C. G. Archaeology and agreed with John Mills at West Sussex County Council. The fieldwork described below was carried – out by Christopher Greatorex and Mike Seager Thomas of C. G. Archaeology between the 18th and 20th August 2004.
- 1.5. All aspects of the project were commissioned by Steyning Museum Trust, to whom thanks are extended.

2.0. GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND.

- 2.1. The 1: 50,000 British Geological Survey (Sheet 318 / 333: Brighton and Worthing) records the underlying geology at the site as Lower Chalk.

3.0. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

- 3.1. The archaeological and historical evidence for the development of medieval Steypning has been discussed elsewhere (eg. Hudson 1980; Hudson 1987 and V.C.H. *Sussex* 6, 220 – 225) and thus merits only brief description here. The summary of the community's origin and early years presented below is largely reproduced from a relatively recent paper entitled "Archaeological excavations in Steypning, 1992 – 95: further evidence for the evolution of a Late Saxon small town" (Gardiner and Greateorex 1997).
- 3.2. A series of archaeological investigations undertaken within Steypning since the 1960's has clarified many aspects of the medieval town. Remains of Saxo-Norman date have been well represented in all excavations, with the exception of work at Testers near White Horse Square (Gardiner 1988). Consequently, the probable extent of the settlement at this time can be elucidated. The Tanyard Lane stream seems to have marked the northernmost boundary of the town, with pottery found in Tanyard Lane itself suggesting that the community did at least extend towards this natural barrier (Gardiner and Greateorex 1997). The excavated farmstead at Market Field would also appear to have been sited on the periphery of the town, as no remains were discovered during work to its north and north – west (Gardiner 1993). Although the investigations at White Horse Square were devoid of Saxo-Norman features, subsequent archaeological fieldwork undertaken at Coombe Court demonstrates that the Saxo-Norman settlement did reach at least as far south as School Lane (Gardiner and Greateorex 1997). "It has been argued that the later medieval 'new town' of Steypning was laid out beyond the limits of the Saxo-Norman urban area. The rear boundary of the burgage plots on the north - east side of High Street suggest the presence of earlier Saxo-Norman enclosures. Only the eastern extent of the town remains to be defined, but it is possible that it was marked by the watercourse adjoining Coombe Court called the River Brad by Evans" (Gardiner and Greateorex 1997, 168).

- 3.3. The topography of Steyning during the Saxo-Norman period is thus reasonably clear. The settlement lay to the south and west of St. Andrew's Church, which was itself situated above a tidal inlet to the north. The main structures were located "around the intersection of a north – south road known as the Portway marked by Newham Lane and Church Street and an east – west track. The line of the east – west road is uncertain. It is clearly marked by Mouse Lane to the west of Steyning. Its course to the east may be marked either by School Lane and Holland Lane, or by Tanyard Lane and Kings Barn Lane, or indeed both. The means by which the route crossed the Adur before the construction of a causeway at Bramber is uncertain" (*ibid*).
- 3.4. Approximately 2% of the probable area of Saxo-Norman Steyning has now been subject to archaeological examination. The results of these investigations show that even around the church the community possessed a fairly low density of occupation and a level of activity considerably less than the main towns of the time. In fact, some parts of the settlement such as the wet land adjacent stretches of Tanyard Stream appear to have remained completely devoid of dwellings.
- 3.5. In Steyning, "high status 10th – century buildings set near to the church were superseded in the 11th century by a greater number of structures evidently of lower status. These were presumably the houses of the smallholders which were found in or close by many 11th – century towns" (Gardiner and Greatorex 1997, 169 – 70).
- 3.6. During the 12th or early 13th century it seems that the centre of the town moved to a new planned site on the present day High Street (Gardiner 1988, 60 – 61). "Part of the area of the former Saxo–Norman settlement near the church reverted to farmland and remained open until the town expanded in the late 20th century" (Gardiner and Greatorex 1997, 143).
- 3.7. Two archaeological fieldwork projects undertaken in the immediate vicinity of the current Area of Interest (A.O.I.) are worthy of particular attention. In

1989 a rescue excavation was undertaken during groundworks associated with the construction of the current Steyning Museum (Reynolds 1992). This work revealed a ditch and pit dating to the 11th or early 12th century and a second pit of late 13th or early 14th century origin. A range of 10th – 15th century artefacts including examples of decorative metalwork and fragments of building material was recovered.

- 3.8. The site of the proposed museum extension also lies approximately 30m. to the south of an excavation directed by the author of this document in 1994 / 5 (Gardiner and Greatorrex 1997). Here the division of activity into three partially overlapping phases has allowed general trends to be identified. The site encompassed a number of pits dating to c.950 – 1250 AD, although activity did not increase until the 13th century. The majority of the recorded pits predating 1250 lay on the east side of the excavation. The remains of a sunken building have been tentatively assigned to the 13th century. During the second phase of the site (1200 – 1450 AD) it is notable that with just one exception all the cut features were located on the west side of the excavation. The virtual absence of pits on the site's east side may indicate that it was occupied by a ground – set building (however, no evidence for any such structure had survived). The third phase excavated in 1994 / 5 (1400 – 1700 AD) was represented by the remnants of a wall (part of a larger building extending beyond the limits of the site) a ditch and the base of an oven.

4.0. PROJECT OBJECTIVES.

4.1. The primary objectives of the archaeological fieldwork are summarised below.

- Establish the presence / absence of archaeological features across the area of proposed development.
- Determine the extent, condition, character and date of any archaeological deposits revealed within the trial - trench.
- Establish the ecofactual / palaeoenvironmental potential of located archaeological features.
- Ensure the satisfactory documentation of all identified archaeological and palaeoenvironmental deposits.

5.0. INVESTIGATIVE METHODOLOGY.

- 5.1. A 9m. – long and 2m. – wide trench was dug in the location shown on Figure 2 by a tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. Under the direction of C. G. Archaeology, undifferentiated overburden was thus removed from the cutting to expose the archaeological deposits described in Section 6.0.
- 5.2. The evaluation trench encompassed an area of 18m² and thus represents a c.28.5% sample of the proposed building footprint.
- 5.3. Each revealed context was investigated manually in order to assess its archaeological / palaeoenvironmental potential, documented on an individual pro-forma and levelled with respect to Ordnance Datum. All identified features were planned at a scale of 1:50 in relationship to the trench outline, with excavated sections being drawn at 1: 10.
- 5.4. It should be noted that a full black and white and colour transparency photographic record of the fieldwork was maintained as appropriate.

6.0. FIELDWORK RESULTS.

- 6.1. An extremely compact deposit of homogeneous dark grey – brown silty clay overburden **(1)** with an average thickness of c.0.70m. was first stripped from the trench. Layer 1 contained numerous fragments of modern brick / tile and clearly represented a relatively recent deposit. Nevertheless, a small, mixed assemblage of residual Romano-British, possible later Saxon, Saxo-Norman, Medieval and Post-medieval pottery was also retrieved from the removed material (see Table 2). The earlier wares were seemingly concentrated towards the eastern end of the cutting.
- 6.2. The excavation of Layer 1 revealed the immediately underlying natural Upper Greensand **(2)** which was itself dissected by six separate cuts **(3, 5, 8, 10, 12 and 14)** (see figures 3 and 4). The fieldwork failed to uncover any evidence for the basal Lower Chalk recorded at the site by the British Geological Survey (see Section 2.0.). The fairly sharp boundary between layers 1 and 2 was however noted.
- 6.3. Cut 3 comprised a small oval – shaped feature with a maximum dimension of 0.39m. and depth of c. 0.20m. The single light grey – brown silty clay fill **(4)** of this possible steep – sided and round – based posthole yielded four sherds of Saxo-Norman pottery and a fragment of oyster shell.
- 6.4. Cut 5 consisted of a c.0.55m. – wide and 0.25m. – deep linear feature running across the trench in an approximate north – south direction. This ditch / gulley possessed a rounded section profile and contained two distinct fills **(6 and 7)**. The investigation of the uppermost mid grey silty clay deposit **(6)** gleaned one sherd of possible later Saxon pottery, 10 sherds of Saxo-Norman pottery and one oyster shell. The primary fill of light grey – brown silty clay **(7)** also produced one later Saxon and one Saxo-Norman sherd, a sheep / goat's tooth and a fragment of oyster shell.

- 6.5. The northernmost revealed end of Cut 5 had obviously been dissected by a sub – rectangular intrusion of comparatively recent origin **(8)**. In fact a total of three modern features seemingly used as refuse pits were identified across the trench **(8, 10 and 12)**.
- 6.6. Although not subject to intrusive examination, the latest surviving fill of Cut 8 was recorded as a loose, dark grey silty clay **(9)**. It may be worth noting that part of a mid 20th century glass milk bottle was also found in association with the exposed surface of this deposit.
- 6.7. Cut 10 appeared to be oval in shape and held a single homogeneous fill of loose very dark grey silty clay **(11)** with modern brick / tile and glass throughout. Its excavation yielded one residual sherd of Saxo-Norman pottery, as well as a 20th century tin can.
- 6.8. Cut 12 was the third pit of certain modern origin located during the evaluation. This c.0.75m. – wide and 0.30m. – deep feature contained just one loose dark grey silty clay fill **(13)** and what has been tentatively interpreted as an early 20th century iron door stop (artefact not retained within Site Archive).
- 6.9. Cut 14 comprised an apparently rounded feature of unconfirmed form and function discovered in the south–eastern corner of the trench. Its uppermost surviving fill of compact mid yellow – brown silty clay **(16)** directly overlay a primary deposit of densely – packed sub-angular flint nodules **(15)**. These stones were set within a c.50mm. - thick silty clay matrix and in effect formed a contiguous lining around the sides and base of the 0.40m. – deep cut. No dating evidence was recovered from the excavation of this probable pit. However, a fragment of quernstone (stone type unidentified) was found to have been incorporated into the feature’s primary fill **(15)**.
- 6.10. In addition to the investigation of cuts 3, 5, 8, 10, 12 and 14, a box-section was excavated by hand across a discrete area of mid orange – brown silty

clay **(17)** located in the south-west corner of the trench. This poorly – defined deposit possessed a maximum thickness of just 80mm. and lay immediately above the natural Upper Greensand **(2)**. Context 17 did not contain any archaeological artefacts and thus remains resistant to current interpretation.

Table 1: Context Register.

CONTEXT NUMBER.	CONTEXT TYPE.	RETAINED FINDS.	NOTES.
1.	Overburden.	Mixed pottery (see Table 2).	
2.	Upper Greensand.		Natural geology. Cut by 3, 5, 8, 10, 12 and 14.
3.	Oval cut.		Possible posthole. Filled by 4.
4.	Fill of oval cut.	Saxo-Norman pot. Oyster shell.	Only fill of 3.
5.	Linear cut.		Ditch / gully. Filled by 6 and 7. Cut by 8.
6.	Fill of linear cut.	Later Saxon pot? Saxo-Norman pot. Oyster shell.	Latest fill of 5. Above 7. Cut by 8.
7.	Fill of linear cut.	Later Saxon pot. Saxo-Norman pot. Oyster shell. Sheep / goat tooth.	Primary fill of 5. Below 6. Cut by 8.
8.	Modern cut.		Modern pit. Filled by 9. Cuts 5, 6 and 7.
9.	Fill of modern cut		Only fill of mod.

			pit 8.
10.	Modern cut.		Modern pit. Filled by 11.
11.	Fill of modern cut.	Saxo-Norman pot (residual).	Only fill of mod. pit 10.
12.	Modern cut.		Modern pit. Filled by 13.
13.	Fill of modern cut.		Only fill of mod. pit 12.
14.	Cut.		Probable pit (date / function unclear) Filled by 15, 16.
15.	Fill of cut.	Quernstone frag.	Primary fill of 14. Below 16.
16.	Fill of cut		Latest fill of 14. Above 15.
17.	Deposit		Date, form and function unclear. Above 2.

7.0. POTTERY REPORT – by Mike Seager Thomas.

- 7.1. The excavated trench yielded 42 sherds weighing 466 grams. The assemblage can be divided into two interpretative groups, the first from contexts 1 (overburden) and 11 (fill of modern pit) comprising material of Romano-British, possible later Saxon, Saxo-Norman, high Medieval and early Post-medieval date, and the second from contexts 4, 6 and 7 comprising material of possible later Saxon and Saxo-Norman date. The inhomogeneity of the former group indicates that the overburden removed from the trench has been mixed. Its interpretative importance relates to the taphonomy of the site, rather than the periods represented in it. By contrast the relative homogeneity of the latter group probably indicates that it has not been disturbed, that the features from which it was recovered were filled during or not long after the Saxo-Norman period and that pottery using activities were occurring in the vicinity of the trench around this period – hardly surprising in view of the known Saxo-Norman occupation nearby.
- 7.2. The dating of the assemblage, details of which are given in Table 2, is based upon that of analogous fabrics and forms from Steyning and elsewhere in West Sussex. GW is a generic term for Romano-British grey wares: the example from Steyning cannot be identified with a specific datable group. Fabrics with codes beginning in D are comparable to Gardiner's Adur Valley Saxo-Norman fabrics and fabrics with codes beginning in CSW to his Central Sussex Weald high Medieval fabrics (Gardiner and Greatorex 1997). WSW refers to the green-glazed fabric – but not the form – of West Sussex Ware jugs (Barton 1979). The soot-soaking of fabrics DH and DL may indicate a later Saxon, rather than a Saxo-Norman date for these sherds. R refers to the ubiquitous glazed red earthenwares of the immediately Post-medieval period. Closely datable forms from the site include the grey ware rim, morphologically related to the early Romano-British bead-rim jar, and the finger-tip impressed rim which in fabric DH can only be Saxo-Norman.

Table 2: Pottery dating evidence.

Pottery group	Context	Fabric	No. of sherds	Form/other chronologically diagnostic traits	Probable date
1	(1)	GW	1	Pointed rim of round-shouldered, closed-mouth jar	R-B (1 st -2 nd century AD)
		DH	1	Soot-soaked	Possible later Saxon
		DH	15	Flat, externally expanded, very shelly rim	Saxo-Norman
		CSW6	2		High medieval
		R	2		Post-medieval (17 th -18 th century)
		WSW	1		High medieval
		Fine sandy	1		Undatable
	(11)	DH	1	Finger-tip impressed rim	Saxo-Norman
2	(4)	DH	4	Squared rim; ribbed (tri-form) handle	Saxo-Norman
	(6)	Sandy	1		Undatable
		DH	10		Saxo-Norman
		DL	1	Soot-soaked	Possible later Saxon
	(7)	DH	1	Saggy base	Saxo-Norman
		DH	1	Soot-soaked	Later-Saxon

8.0. CONCLUSIONS.

- 8.1. The evaluation undertaken at Steyning Museum uncovered a single possible posthole of definite Saxo-Norman origin **(3)** and one later Saxon or Saxo-Norman ditch / gulley **(5)**. An apparent stone – lined pit of uncertain date **(14)** was also revealed within the trench.
- 8.2. Three modern pits **(8, 10 and 12)** and an 80mm. – thick clay deposit of indeterminate form, function and date **(17)** have additionally been described in Section 6.0. The potential of the recorded contexts to yield sealed and dated information of palaeoenvironmental importance is believed to be low.
- 8.3. The narrow confines of the evaluation trench preclude any objective wider interpretation of archaeologically significant contexts 3, 5 and 14. Nevertheless, these features are clearly analogous with the evidence of later Saxon and Saxo-Norman domestic activity previously excavated in the immediate vicinity of the site (see sections 3.7. and 3.8.).
- 8.4. Indeed, a linear feature similar in date, profile and alignment to our Context 5 was also documented during archaeological work carried – out during the construction of the existing museum building 15 years ago. The *precise* location of this earlier discovery is a little difficult to pinpoint from the published report (Reynolds 1992). Yet, given their obvious similarity, it is just about possible to suggest that both lengths of ditch / gulley actually comprise parts of the same feature, cautiously interpreted by Reynolds as a short – lived tenement boundary (*ibid*). The confirmation or rejection of such a theory would of course require further fieldwork and archival research.
- 8.5. The latest archaeological project undertaken in Steyning has thus further confirmed the siting of a small later Saxon – Saxo-Norman settlement around St. Andrew’s Church (see Section 3.3.). It is also apparent that the density of

surviving remains decreases significantly the further south one gets from the church and modern day Church Street.

- 8.6. The relatively shallow nature of the investigated cuts and the fairly sharp boundary found between the removed overburden **(1)** and natural geology **(2)** of the site indicates that some truncation might have occurred across the Area of Interest (perhaps during construction of the existing museum building). Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the footprint of the proposed museum extension encompasses a low density spread of features, of some importance to our detailed understanding of Steypning's later Saxon – Saxo-Norman origins and development.
- 8.7. The investigative methodology employed by C. G. Archaeology is considered to have satisfied the project objectives set out in Section 4.0.

9.0. ARCHIVE.

- 9.1. The full paper, photographic and digital records arising from this project will be collated in accordance with '*Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage*' (UKICI 1990) and deposited with the retained artefact assemblage at Steining Museum.

10.0. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

- 10.1. C. G. Archaeology would like to acknowledge Chris Tod, the Hon. Curator of Steypning Museum and John Mills, Archaeologist, West Sussex County Council for their assistance with the project. Figure 2 is based upon a plan supplied to C. G. Archaeology by the client.

11.0. REFERENCES.

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S.M.R. SUMMARY SHEET.

Site Code.	SLE 04					
Site identification and address.	Steyning Museum, Church Street, Steyning					
County, district and / or borough.	West Sussex					
O.S. grid ref.	TQ 17825 11315					
Geology.	Upper Greensand					
Project number.	04 / 05					
Fieldwork type.	Eval. X	Excav.	W.Brief.	Survey.	Other.	
Site type.	Rural.	Urban. X	Other.			
Date of fieldwork.	18 th – 20 th August 2004					
Client.	Steyning Museum Trust					
Project manager.	Christopher Greatorex					
Project supervisor	Christopher Greatorex					
Period summary.	Palaeo.	Meso.	Neo.	B. Age.	I. Age.	R – B. X
	Sax. X	Med. X	P. Med X	Other. Modern and undated features		
Project Summary. An archaeological field evaluation of land proposed for development at Steyning Museum, Church Street, Steyning was undertaken by C. G. Archaeology. The excavation of a 9m. – long and 2m. – wide trench across the Area of Interest revealed a single possible posthole of certain Saxo-Norman origin and one later Saxon or Saxo-Norman ditch / gully. An apparent stone – lined pit of uncertain date was also recorded. This project has thus confirmed that the intended site encompasses a low density spread of archaeological features, of some importance to our detailed understanding of Steyning's later Saxon - Saxo-Norman genesis and development.						

